



American Indian Research Training Needs

Executive Summary

The U.S. Indian Health Service (IHS) and the National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS) jointly hosted a Roundtable Conference on “American Indian Research Training Needs” on August 23 and 24, 1999 at the NIH Natcher Conference Center in Bethesda, Maryland. This Roundtable Discussion included the participation of American Indian research scientists from across the United States. The purpose of the meeting was to learn what the needs and concerns are among American Indians regarding biomedical research. Representatives from various NIH institutes attended to hear the final recommendations of the Roundtable participants. The desired outcome of the Roundtable Conference was to enhance existing mechanisms or development of new research and training programs based upon American Indian leadership and advice.

In preparation for the meeting, each NIH institute was requested to provide documentation regarding existing research funding to American Indians, and outreach and training efforts focused on American Indian populations. This material was provided to the participants in a Briefing Book prior to the meeting. The discussion format centered on four major areas. These were:

- Issues of Credibility with the American Indian Community
- Needs of New Basic Science Investigators
- Medical Doctors and Professionals who want to do Research
- Encouraging and Engaging Students – “What has worked?”

Panels were convened with “lead discussants” in each of the four topic areas. Following each of the four panels, the Roundtable participants began to shape specific policy recommendations. These policy recommendations were shared with representatives from each of the NIH institutes and other NIH officials on the last afternoon of the Roundtable Conference. Recommendations focused on the following major areas:

- Outreach
- Grant application process and approval procedures (for research proposals involving American Indian and Alaska Native communities)
- Working with non-traditional grant recipients
- Working with tribal colleges
- Mentoring and training for students, young faculty and MD’s
- Pre-college initiatives
- Understanding and respecting American Indian and Alaska Native culture

The National Institutes of Health is headquartered in Bethesda, Maryland, just outside of Washington, DC. It is the mission of the NIH to “uncover new knowledge that will lead to better health for everyone. NIH works toward that mission by: conducting research in its own laboratories; supporting the research of non-Federal scientists in universities, medical schools, hospitals, and research institutions throughout the country and abroad; helping in the training of research investigators; and fostering communications of biomedical information.” NIH is composed of 24 separate “institutions, centers and divisions.” The total budget for NIH in Fiscal Year 1999 was \$15.9 billion. The budget for the Indian Health Service in the same year was just over \$2.2 billion, most of which funds the direct health services for American Indians and Alaska Natives. Meaningful health research to improve services and understanding of Indian health will eventually require better collaboration between American Indian communities and the NIH and other resources.